Pet Overpopulation and Spay/Neuter – Intermediate/Advanced Lesson Plan

**Objective:** To help students understand the problem of pet overpopulation and how it can be solved.

**Materials:**

* Dog Overpopulation Math Worksheet
* 15 Dogs, 45 Cats, and You Handout
* Sterilization True False Worksheet (“On the Right Path”)

**Warm-up- Discuss Pet Overpopulation**

Ask students if they have ever seen animals without a home. Do they see them often? Do they look happy? Do they look healthy?

**Activity – Overpopulation Math**

* Explain to children that every year, millions of dogs and cats are born that we cannot find homes for. You may think that you only have one or two pets, but if those pets aren’t sterilized, they are contributing to the problem.
* How many offspring can one dog produce? Do **Dog Overpopulation Math Worksheet**. Go over answers as a class (answer is 511.) Explain that this is only for one dog over two years. Imagine how many puppies one dog could have in a lifetime!
* Do you think the number of kittens a cat could produce in a few years would be similar? Explain that cats can actually reproduce more quickly than dogs. One study shows that one female cat and her offspring can produce **400,000** cats in only seven years.

**Discussion – Overpopulation Consequences**

* What does this mean for each student in this classroom? Distribute the **15 Dogs, 45 Cats and You handout**. Explain that this number of pets isn’t just for your family, it is for you individually. Can you handle caring for all those animals? The clear answer is NO.
* Because of the pet overpopulation issue, many dogs and cats end up living on the street. It isn’t fair to just release animals to be homeless. The lives of homeless stray animals is very difficult because many things can threaten their lives. Ask the students to brainstorm the problems stray animals face living on the streets. Some answers may be:

1. Starvation

2. Loneliness

3. Harsh weather

4. Vehicles (hit by car)

5. Abuse by people

6. Attacked by other animals

* A few stray dogs and cats live in small cages in animal shelters. They often are not fed well and don’t get enough exercise. Most of them will not find homes and must be put to sleep.
* So what is the answer to this issue? Sterilization!

**Activity - Sterilization True or False**

Distribute Sterilization True False Worksheet. Once students are finished discuss the true and false statements on the worksheet.

**True Statements:**

* Spayed or neutered animals live longer, healthier lives. Sterilized pets live an average of two to three years longer than pets that are not sterilized, and are less likely to get cancer and many other serious illnesses. Because sterilized pets lead healthier lives, spaying or neutering your pet can save you money on vet bills.
* Spayed or neutered animals are calmer and better behaved. They spray and mark less, and are less likely to want to roam away from your home. Spaying eliminates messy and annoying heat cycles.
* About 156,000 stray cats and dogs are abused and killed in Ukraine each year. Promoting pet sterilization can lead to a major decrease in this number.
* Spaying and neutering increases your pet’s loyalty and focuses their attention on you so they are easier to train.
* Sterilization will not alter pets’ personality traits. Spaying and neutering animals does reduce aggression however, and helps protect children from bites and scratches.
* In 2008, the Kiev City Administration allocated 8,000,000UAH for a dog sterilization program for **one year**.
* Spay/neuter procedures are not dangerous or painful. Spaying and neutering are the most common surgeries performed on animals and are extremely safe. The recovery time is minimal: usually a week to 10 days.

**False Statements Corrected:**

* **It’s better for pets to have one litter before being spayed.** Medical evidence indicates just the opposite. In fact, the evidence shows that females spayed before their first heat cycle are typically healthier. And every litter contributes to the overpopulation problem.
* **Animal shelters are able to find homes for all the pets they receive**. Animal shelters are not able to find homes for most of the pets they receive. Most animals that enter shelters live their lives there in small cages or are put to sleep due to lack of space or funding.
* **It’s too expensive to have pets spayed or neutered**. Spaying or neutering an animal in Ukraine is a onetime cost that ranges between 150UAH to 350UAH. This amount pales in comparison to what it would cost to treat an animal attack because your pet was aggressive, to treat cancer or other illnesses, to treat other veterinary issues that could be prevented by sterilizing your pet, or even the cost of feeding your pet and their offspring.
* **Pets will get fat and lazy after they’ve had the operation.** Spaying or neutering does not cause pets to become fat or lazy; too little exercise and too much food cause your pet to be overweight. Sterilizing a dog will not alter its instinct to protect your home and family.
* **It’s okay for my pet to have a litter if I find homes for all the babies.** You may find homes for your pet's puppies and kittens. But you can only control what decisions you make with your own pet, not the decisions other people make with theirs. Your pet’s puppies and kittens, or their puppies or kittens, could end up in an animal shelter, as one of the many homeless pets in every community competing for a home. Will they be one of the lucky ones?
* **Pets who have been spayed or neutered are often more likely to bite.** Pets that are spayed or neutered are **less** likely to bite than non-sterilized pets; sterilized pets are less aggressive and thus safer to have in a family setting.

**Discussion – What can you do to help?**

Ask students what they can do to help stop animal overpopulation. See what ideas you can elicit from them. There are some ideas below for you to get started:

* Spay or neuter your pet at two months of age – don’t wait for the first litter!
* Join in the fight against pet overpopulation. Spread the word!
* Educate your friends and family about spay/neuter facts vs. myths
* It’s a small price to pay for the health of your pet and the prevention of more unwanted animals!